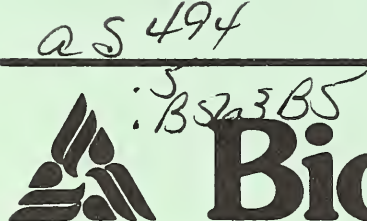


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Biotechnology Notes

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Biotechnology Notes, a compilation of agency activities, news events, and upcoming meetings, is prepared for members of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Committee on Biotechnology in Agriculture (CBA) by USDA's Office of Agricultural Biotechnology (OAB).

INSIDE USDA

MISSION ACCOMPLISHED: USDA'S BIOTECH OFFICE TO CLOSE

After almost 9 years at the helm, USDA's Office of Agricultural Biotechnology (OAB) will be closing its doors and discontinuing all activities. This action will not have any effect on other USDA-biotechnology programs, regulations, policies, or activities. The closing, which is due to fiscal constraints and changing priorities, becomes effective mid-February. Among the activities scheduled to cease operations are the Agricultural Biotechnology Research Advisory Committee (ABRAC) and *Biotechnology Notes*. February will be the last month of publication.

OAB was established in 1986 by order of the Secretary of Agriculture with primary responsibility for "implementing and coordinating the Department's policies and procedures pertaining to all facets of agricultural biotechnology." Toward that end, the OAB has completed its mission.

OAB's first priority was to harmonize the biotechnology initiatives at USDA. This was accomplished by creating the **Biotechnology Council**, a consortium of senior-level employees from eight agencies who met monthly to discuss and make recommendations on issues having an impact on departmental biotechnology programs.

The **Biotechnology Information Group** was also formed. This body was comprised of public information officers who met regularly to discuss public outreach activities. The latter was instrumental in helping OAB produce the publication, "**Biotechnology At USDA**," a directory of agency activities and contacts.

OAB also provided leadership and staff support for USDA's **Agricultural Biotechnology Research Advisory Committee (ABRAC)**, which holds its last meeting January 19 in Arlington, VA. ABRAC developed **Guidelines for Research Involving Planned**

introduction into the Environment of Genetically Modified Organisms and the Performance Standards for Safely Conducting Research with Genetically Modified Fish and Shellfish. Both documents assist scientists worldwide in evaluating the environmental safety of their research experiments. The ABRAC also provided advice to USDA agencies on risk assessment, food safety issues, socio-ethical issues, and public information.

In the international arena, OAB recognized the value of international cooperation and coordination in biotechnology. It published the brochure, **"Guidance for U.S. Researchers Involved In International Exchange on Agricultural Biotechnology"** and hosted a special event, **"Biotechnology Day at the National Arboretum,"** for agriculture officials from 30 foreign embassies. The office has chaired, staffed, and sponsored numerous task forces and symposia which brought together audiences of both similar and divergent views to explore issues, develop a dialogue, and work to improve the research and development of agricultural biotechnology products and processes.

OAB chaired and guided the multi-agency effort that provided research, program, and budget data used for the FY 93 and 94 **Presidential initiatives on Biotechnology Research** and most recently played a major role in preparing the White House publication, **"Biotechnology for the 21st Century: New Horizons.** This publication reported on Federal research efforts in science and technology and identified new and promising areas where there might be gaps in Federal support.

The OAB worked vigorously with the media to help dispel common myths about biotechnology, to educate and inform consumers about the potential benefits of biotechnology as well as its limits, and to encourage public participation in the decisionmaking process.

Finally, OAB created a free, monthly news publication, **Biotechnology Notes**, meant to inform and educate USDA's clientele about policy issues, research, regulation, technology transfer, and educational activities taking place around the world.

SPECIAL NOTE:

After February 19, correspondence in the following broad subject areas should be addressed as follows:

1. Biotechnology Information: Ray Dobert, Director, Biotechnology Information Center, 4th floor, USDA National Agricultural Library, 10301, Baltimore Blvd., Beltsville, MD 20705-2351; Ph: 301-504-5340; Fax: 301-504-7098
2. Biotechnology Regulations: John Payne, Acting Director, BBEP, USDA/APHIS, Rm. 2D15, 700 River Rd., Riverdale, MD 20737; Ph: 301-734-7602; Fax: 301-734-8669

3. Technology Transfer and Patenting: Richard Parry, USDA/ARS, Rm. 358A, Jamie Whitten Fed. Bldg., 14th and Independence Ave., S.W., Washington, DC 20250

4. Media and Press Information: Maria Bynum, USDA, Office of Communications, 4th floor, Jamie Whitten Fed. Bldg., 14th and Independence Ave., S.W., Washington, DC 20250; Ph: 202-720-5192; Fax: 202-690-3611

ABRAC TO DISCUSS RISK ASSESSMENT; AG BIOTECH EDUCATION

USDA's ABRAC holds its final meeting January 19, 1996 at the Westpark Hotel, 1900 North Fort Myer Drive, Rosslyn, VA from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. The agenda includes an update on progress converting the performance standards for aquatic research into an electronic format as well as plans to hold Federal/State workshops around the country to educate the research community in the use of the performance standards.

There will be several presentations on risk assessment research including an overview of USDA's new Office of Risk Assessment and Cost Benefit Analysis. A discussion of present and future ag biotech educational initiatives will wrap up the meeting. For more details, please call either Al Young or Dan Jones at 202-720-5853; Fax: 202-720-5336.

NBIAP: SPECIAL REPORT ON BT RESISTANCE

USDA's National Biological Impact Assessment Program (NBIAP), which is administered by the Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service, and the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in Blacksburg, VA, wrote a report on the latest thinking about managing pest resistance to Bt (*Bacillus thuringiensis*).

The report contains 11 articles on the issues, strategies for managing resistance in potatoes and corn, a consortium that promotes responsible use of Bt products, and articles expressing the views of organic farmers, academia, and industry. For more details about the report or information on how to order or access, please call Pat Traynor at 540-231-2620; E-mail: traynor@nbiap.biochem.vt.edu

NBIAP REPORT NOW ON INTERNET; BIORESEARCH IRELAND HAS A HOME PAGE

The NBIAP Report, a bulletin loaded with the latest information on agricultural biotechnology, can now be accessed on E-mail. To subscribe, send an e-mail message to news@nbiap.biochem.vt.edu with the words "subscribe newsreport" in the message. You will receive the report the first of each month. For more details, please call Doug King at 540-231-3747 or via E-mail to nbiap@vt.edu

In other electronic news, BioResearch Ireland, Ireland's biotechnology contract research and product development organization, has a Home Page. The address is: <http://www.forbairt.ie/BIORESEARCH.HTML> For more details, please call Phil O'Leary at +353-1-8370177; Fax: +353-1-8370176

"WORKING THE WEB"

That's the name of a course being offered by the University of Wisconsin Biotechnology Center, IdaSmith, and the University of Wisconsin-Extension, January 23, at the New Media Center in Madison, WI. The course will help biotechnology companies use websites to support their customers and promote their products, according to Tom Zinnen, the biotechnology education guru at the Center.

In addition to helping companies, Zinnen believes websites can be used as an educational tool to improve biotechnology literacy among adults and students. "Sharing your images on the World Wide Web . . . is becoming a powerfully cost-efficient way to share pictures and communicate ideas," says Zinnen. This is accomplished by having a Home Page on the Web that includes color slides, graphics, and photos that visually explain tough scientific concepts such as genetic engineering. To learn more, please contact Zinnen at 608-265-2420; E-mail: zinnen@macc.wisc.edu, or <http://www.ideasmith.com/Conference/>

MONTEREY COUNTY SAYS "YES" TO BIOTECH RESEARCH

Last November 21, the Monterey County (California) Board of Supervisors voted unanimously to relax a law restricting biotechnology research. The law had prohibited field trials using genetically modified microorganisms without a special permit -- an obstacle which not one biotechnology company tried to overcome during the 8-year life of the law, according to Jeannette Warnert, Public Information Representative at the University of California Regional Office in Fresno, CA. The new ordinance allows the county ag commissioner to grant permits for genetic engineering projects on agricultural lands. For more details, please contact Warnert at jwarnert@uckac.edu or call 209-225-5611; Fax: 209-225-8624.

NEWS AROUND THE NATION (AND THE WORLD)

DOE SEEKS APPLICANTS TO FUND

The Department of Energy's Biosciences Research Program is seeking pre-grant applications for funding in many areas including control of plant growth and development, genetic transmission and expression, plant-microbial interactions, plant cell wall structure and function, genetics of neglected microorganisms, and photosynthesis. The objective of the research program is to discern and understand basic mechanisms and principles by pursuing basic biochemical, genetic and physiological investigations that may contribute towards providing alternate fuels, petroleum replacement products, energy conservation measures and other technologies such as phytoremediation related to DOE programs. Preapplications are due by February 26, 1996; formal applications are due June 5, 1996. For more details, please call Pat Snyder at 301-903-2873. (This information is from "FIEN's Environmental Weekly," issued weekly via Fax and E-mail by Jack L. Cooper of the Food Industry Environmental Network. For details on subscribing, please call 301-384-8287; Fax: 301-384-8340; E-mail: JLC@fien.com)

BLASTING AWAY AT BLAST DISEASE

Blast is the name of a devastating rice disease that can destroy an entire crop. It is caused by a fungus that has so far proven hard to destroy. Traditionally, varieties possessing genetic resistance are selected for crossing with others through a variety of time-consuming processes, including visual inspection, yield and other measurements. The resistance obtained in the offspring often breaks down after a year or more. Now, however, there may be a more permanent solution, using biotechnology.

Scientists at the International Rice Research Institute in Los Banos, Philippines, used DNA markers to identify the position on the chromosomes of blast resistance genes. At least 30 blast-resistance genes are now known. Being able to hand pick those varieties that have resistance will save much time over conventional breeding methods. The scientists are also studying the genetics of the blast disease organism hoping to find the most effective method of combating the fungus. For more information about the project, please contact Robert D. Huggan, IRRI Information Center, P.O. Box 933, Manila 1099, Philippines; or call 63-2-818-1926; Fax: 63-2-891-1292; E-mail: RHUGGAN@CGNET.com

IN CASE YOU WEREN'T THERE

■ **USDA/OAB Director Alvin Young gave a presentation on functional foods** produced through biotechnology to the "1995 International Chemical Congress of Pacific Basin Societies, December 17-22, 1995, in Honolulu, Hawaii. He said the tools of biotechnology have made it possible to produce "functional foods" that have enhanced properties, such as tomatoes with increased levels of vitamins C and E. He also discussed the links between these new food products and diet and gave insight into the policy issues surrounding functional foods.

■ **"New Strategies for Reaching the Global Consumer: An International Consumer Education Expo and Forum"** took place in Washington, DC, November 29-December 1, 1995. Leaders in government, consumer organizations, education and business from around the world gave candid opinions about consumer education and information needs, evolving technology, and the challenges for consumer protection. A live, interactive televideo conference linked experts in the U.K. and the United States to discuss how technology can reach and teach consumers around the globe. OAB/USDA organized and staffed a multi-agency exhibit that highlighted consumer outreach activities. The Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service provided fact sheets for consumers about food safety, good nutrition, rural family financial planning, managing waste, and integrated pest management. The University of Wisconsin Extension Service provided biotechnology lesson plans, education catalogues, and posters; the Agricultural Research Service provided literature about science education; the National Arboretum/ARS displayed a new floral plant, *Ornithogalum*, which was developed through biotechnology and will soon be commercially available. The conference closed with an international "quiz show" for high school students. One team from the United States faced off with a team from the U.K. answering questions about the environment, personal finance, safety, and technology. (The U.S. team won). The meeting was organized by the National Coalition for Consumer Education. For more details, please contact Carole Glade at 201-377-8987.

NEW PUBLICATIONS

■ ***National Science Education Standards.*** A report from the National Research Council on science education for grades K-12. Ordering information may be obtained by calling 202-334-2138.

■ ***Biotechnology and the Federal Circuit*** by Kenneth J. Burchfiel. Published by BNA Books. For ordering details please call 1-800-960-1220; Fax: 908-417-0482.

■ ***Enzymatic Browning and Its Prevention.*** Edited by Chang Y. Lee. Published by the American Chemical Society, Washington, DC. August 1995. To order, please call 202-872-4600.

UPCOMING MEETINGS

Jan. 14-18: The International Plant Genome IV Conference. San Diego, CA. For details, please call 212-643-1750; Fax: 212-643-1758; E-mail: Scherago@Biotechnet.Com

Jan. 15-18: BioEast '96. Washington, DC. Sponsored by *Genetic Engineering News* and the International Society for the Advancement of Biotechnology. For details, please send a fax to 301-652-4951.

Jan. 19: Meeting of USDA's Agricultural Biotechnology Research Advisory Committee. Washington, DC. For details, please call 202-720-5853.

Jan. 22-24: "Commercializing Biopesticides: Applied Products and Transgenic Plants." Washington, DC. Sponsored by International Business Communications. For details, please call 508-481-6400 or send a Fax to 508-481-7911.

Feb. 8-9: Southeast University/Industry Technology Transfer Conference. Orlando, FL. Sponsored by Technology Transfer Conferences Inc. For details, call 615-366-0679; Fax: 615-366-0695.

Feb. 4-17: Intellectual Property Rights International Internship Program: Technology Transfer, Use and Management Under GATT. Michigan State University. Contact Karim Maredia at 517-353-5262; Fax: 517-432-1982; E-mail: kmaredia@msu.edu

Feb. 8-13: AAAS Meeting. Baltimore, MD. Topics include biosafety, biodiversity, microbial diversity, functional foods, etc. For details, please call 202-326-6417; Fax: 202-842-1065.

Feb. 13: "Engineering Functionality into Foods: Benefits for the Consumer" and "Biosafety Issues of Risk and Responsibility in Biotechnology." AAAS Annual Meeting (Feb. 8-13), Baltimore, MD. For details, please call 202-326-6450; Fax: 202-289-4021.

Mar. 4-5: "Agricultural Biotechnology '96". Santa Fe, NM. Sponsored by International Business Communications. For details, please call 508-481-6400; Fax: 508-481-7911.

Mar. 25-26: Western University/Industry Technology Transfer Conference. Las Vegas, NV. See Feb. 8-9 listing above for contact information.

Mar. 27-30: Third European Congress of Fungal Genetics; Muenster, Germany.
Contact Paul Tudzynski at Fax: 0251-83-4998; E-mail: tudzyns@uni-muenster.de

July 14-18: "Fourth International Symposium on the Biosafety Results of Field Tests of Genetically Modified Plants and Microorganisms" Tsukuba, Japan. Please telephone Akihiro Hino at 81-3-3502-3919; Fax: 81-3-3502-4028; E-mail: akhino@s.affrc.go.jp

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